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ROLLING STONE

Why does this eleven year-old stay up past his bedtime?

Michael Jackson and his six gold records

The Murder of Ruben Salazar by Hunter S. Thompson

Henry Diltz

Strange Rumblings in Aztlan

The + Murder + and Resurrection of Ruben Salazar by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department + Savage polarization & the making of a Martyr + Bad news for the Mexican-American + Worse news for the pig + + And now the New Chicano + riding a grim new wave + + + The rise of the Batos Locos + Brown Power and a fistful of reds + Rude politics in the Barrio + + Which side are you on + brother? + There is no more middleground + No place to hide on Whittier Boulevard + + No refuge from the helicopters + No hope in the courts + No peace with the Man + No leverage anywhere + and no light at the end of this tunnel + + + Nada +

by Hunter S. Thompson

Morning comes hard to the Hotel Ashmun; this is not a place where the guests spring eagerly out of bed to greet the fresh new day. But on this particular morning everybody in the place is awake at the crack of dawn: There is a terrible pounding and shrieking in the hallway, near room No. 267. Some junkie has ripped the doorknob off the communal bathroom, and now the others can't get in—so they are trying to kick the door down. The voice of the manager wavers hysterically above the din: "Come on now, fellas — do I have to call the sheriff?" The reply comes hard and fast: "You filthy gabacho pig! You call the fuckin sheriff and I'll cut your fuckin throat." And now the sound of wood cracking, more screaming, the sound of running feet outside my door, No. 267.

The door is locked, thank Christ—but how can you say for sure in a place like the Hotel Ashmun? Especially on a morning like this with a mob of wild junkies locked out of the hall bathroom and maybe knowing that No. 267 is the only room within lunging distance that has a private bath. It is the best in the house, at $5.80 a night, and the lock on the door is brand new. The old one was ripped out about 12 hours earlier, just before I checked in.

The desk clerk had gone to a lot of trouble to get me into this room. His key wouldn't fit the new lock. "Jesus Christ!" he kept muttering. "This key *has* to fit! This is a brand new *Yale lock.*" He stared balefully at the bright new key in his hand.

"Yeah," I said. "But that key is for a *Webster* lock."

"By God you're *right*!" he exclaimed. And he rushed off, leaving us standing there in the hallway with big chunks of ice in our hands. "What's wrong with that guy?" I asked. "He seems out of control—all this sweating and grappling and jabbering . . ."

Benny Luna laughed. "Man, he's nervous! You think it's *normal* for him to be lettin four nasty lookin Chicanos into his best room at three in the morning? With all of us carryin chunks of ice and funny-lookin leather bags?" He was staggering around the hall, convulsed with laughter. "Man, this guy is *freaked!* He doesn't know *what's* goin on!"

"*Three* Chicanos," said Oscar. "And one hillbilly."

"You didn't tell him I was a writer, did you?" I asked. I'd noticed Oscar talking to the man, a tall sort of defeated looking Germanic type, but I hadn't paid much attention.

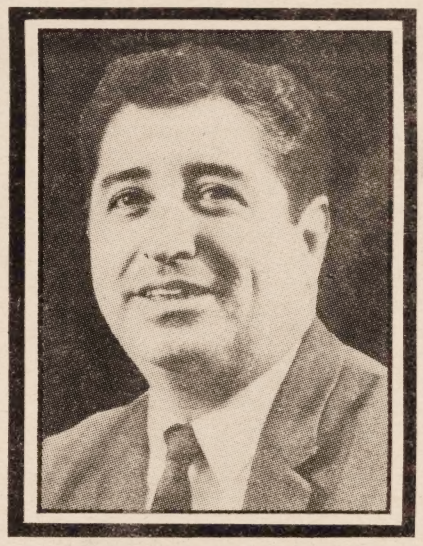
"No, but he recognized *me*," Oscar replied. "He said, 'You're the lawyer, aren't you?' So I said 'That's right, and I want your best room for this gabacho friend of mine.'" He grinned. "Yeah, he knows *something's* wrong with this scene, but he doesn't know what. These guys are scared of *everything* now. Every merchant on Whittier Boulevard is sure he's living on borrowed time, so they go all to pieces at the first sign of anything strange going on. It's been this way ever since Salazar."

The room clerk/manager/keeper/etc. suddenly rounded the hallway corner with the right key, and let us into the room. It was a winner — a run-down echo of a place I stayed in a few years ago in the slums of Lima, Peru. I can't recall the name of that place, but I remember that all the room keys were attached to big wooden knobs about the size of grapefruits, too big to fit in a pocket. I thought about suggesting this to our man in the Hotel Ashmun, but he didn't wait around for tips or small-talk. He was gone in flash, leaving us alone to deal with a quart of rum and God only knows what else. . . . We put the ice in a basin next to the bed and chopped it up with a huge rigging knife. The only music was a tape cassette of *Let It Bleed.*

What better music for a hot night on Whittier Boulevard in 1971? This has not been a peaceful street, of late. And in truth it was *never* peaceful. Whittier is to the vast Chicano *barrio* in East Los Angeles what the Sunset Strip is to Hollywood. This is where the street action lives: The bars, the hustlers, the drug market, the whores—and also the riots, the trashings, killings, gassings, the sporadic bloody clashes with the hated, common enemy: The cops, the Pigs, the Man, that blue-crusted army of fearsome gabacho troops from the East L.A. Sheriff's Department.

The Hotel Ashmun is a good place to stay if you want to get next to whatever's happening on Whittier Boulevard. The window of No. 267 is about 15 feet above the sidewalk and just a few blocks west of the Silver Dollar Cafe, a nondescript tavern that is not much different from any of the others nearby. There is a pool table in the rear, a pitcher of beer sells for a dollar, and the faded Chicano barmaid rolls dice with the patrons to keep the jukebox going. Low number pays, and nobody seems to care who selects the music.

We had been in there earlier, when not much was happening. It was my first visit in six months, since early September when the place was still rancid with the stench of CS gas and fresh varnish. But now, six months later, the Silver Dollar had aired out nicely. No blood on the floor, no ominous holes in the ceiling. The only reminder of my other visit was a thing hanging over the cash register that we all noticed immediately. It was black gas mask, staring blindly out at the room — and below the gas mask was a stark handprinted sign that said: "In memory of August 29, 1970."



Ruben Salazar, 1928—1970

Nothing else, no explanation. But no explanation was necessary—at least not to anybody likely to be found drinking in the Silver Dollar. The customers are locals: Chicanos and barrio people—and every one of them is acutely aware of what happened in the Silver Dollar Cafe on August 29, 1970.

That was the day that Ruben Salazar, the prominent "Mexican-American" columnist for the Los Angeles Times and News Director for bilingual KMEX-TV, walked into the place and sat down on a stool near the doorway to order a beer he would never drink. Because just about

the time the barmaid was sliding his beer across the bar a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy named Tom Wilson fired a tear gas bomb through the front door and blew half of Ruben Salazar's head off. All the other customers escaped out the back exit to the alley, but Salazar never emerged. He died on the floor in a cloud of CS gas—and when his body was finally carried out, hours later, his name was already launched into martyrdom. Within 24 hours, the very mention of the name "Ruben Salazar" was enough to provoke tears and fist-shaking tirades not only along Whittier Boulevard but all over East L.A.

Middle-aged housewives who had never thought of themselves as anything but lame-status "Mexican Americans" just trying to get by in a mean Gringo world they never made suddenly found themselves shouting "Viva La Raza" *in public*. And their husbands—quiet Safeway clerks and lawn-care salesmen, the lowest and most expendable cadres in the Great Gabacho economic machine—were volunteering to *testify*; yes, to stand up in court, or wherever, and calling themselves Chicanos. The term "Mexican-American" fell massively out of favor with all but the old and conservative—and the rich. It suddenly came to mean "Uncle Tom." Or, in the argot of East L.A.—"Tio Taco." The difference between a Mexican-American and a Chicano was the difference between a Negro and a Black.

All this has happened very suddenly. Too suddenly for most people. One of the basic laws of politics is that Action Moves Away from the Center. The middle of the road is only popular when nothing is happening. And nothing serious has been happening politically in East L. A. for longer than most people can remember. Until six months ago the whole place was a colorful tomb, a vast slum full of noise and cheap labor, a rifle shot away from the heart of downtown Los Angeles. The barrio, like Watts, is actually a part of the city core—while places like Hollywood and Santa Monica are separate entities. The Silver Dollar Cafe is a ten-minute drive from City Hall. The Sunset Strip is a 30-minute sprint on the Hollywood Freeway.

Whittier Boulevard is a hell of a long way from Hollywood, by any measure. There is no psychic connection at all. After a week in the bowels of East L. A. I felt vaguely guilty about walking into the bar in the Beverly Hills Hotel and ordering a drink—as if I didn't quite belong there, and the waiters all knew it. I had been there before, under different circumstances, and felt totally comfortable. Or almost. There is no way to . . . well, to hell with that. The point is that this time I felt *different*. I was oriented to a completely different world—15 miles away.

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MARCHA POR LA JUSTICIA

THERE ARE NO POLICE COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN THE CHICANO COMMUNITIES. NO, EVER SINCE THE POLICE RIOT ON AUGUST 29TH IT HAS BECOME TOO OBVIOUS TO IGNORE THE FACT THAT THE LAPD, THE SHERIFFS, AND THE HIGHWAY PATROL HAVE FOR YEARS BEEN SYSTEMATICALLY TRYING TO DESTROY THE TRUE SPIRIT OF OUR PEOPLE. IN THE PAST, POLICE HAVE BROKEN UP EVERY ATTEMPT OF OUR PEOPLE TO GET JUSTICE, THEY HAVE BEATEN YOUNG STUDENTS PROTESTING POOR EDUCATION, RAIDED OFFICES, ARRESTED LEADERS, CALLED US COMMUNISTS AND GANGSTERS IN THE PRESS, AND EVERYTHING ELSE ON THE STREETS WHEN THE PRESS WAS GONE.

EVEN MORE INSIDIOUS THAN THE DIRECT POLITICAL REPRESSION AGAINST LEADERS AND DEMONSTRATIONS IS THE CONTINUOUS ATTACKS ON THE EVERYDAY LIFE OF PEOPLE IN THE BARRIOS. ALMOST EVERY MONTH EACH BARRIO HAS SUFFERED THROUGH AT LEAST ONE CASE OF SEVERE BRUTALITY OR MURDER AND THEN STRUGGLED TO DEFEND FRIENDS AND WITNESSES WHO FACE BUM RAPS. ONE WEEK IT'S SAN FERNANDO, THEN LINCOLN HEIGHTS, EAST L.A., VENICE, THE HARBOR AND POMONA .....THEY HIT ONE BARRIO AT A TIME, TRYING TO BREAK OUR UNITY AND OUR SPIRIT.

ON AUGUST 29TH, THROUGH ALL OF OUR BARRIOS WERE DEMONSTRATIONS FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE AND THE POLICE RIOTED AND ATTACKED. OUT OF FEAR, THEY INSTALLED MARTIAL LAW, ARRESTING AND ABUSING HUNDREDS OF COMMUNITY PEOPLE. THEY KILLED GILRERTO DIAZ, LYNN WARD, AND RUBEN SALAZAR, THE MAN WHO COULD TELL OUR STORY TO THE NATION AND THE WORLD.

WE MUST NOT FORGET THE LESSON OF AUGUST 29TH, THAT THE MAJOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ISSUE WE FACE IS POLICE BRUTALITY. SINCE THE 29TH POLICE ATTACKS HAVE BEEN WORSE. EITHER THE PEOPLE CONTROL THE POLICE, OR WE ARE LIVING IN A POLICE STATE.

WE MUST NOT ALLOW THE POLICE TO BREAK OUR UNITY. WE MUST CARRY ON THE SPIRIT OF RUBEN SALAZAR AND EXPOSE THIS BRUTALITY TO THE NATION AND THE WORLD. THE CHICANO MORATORIUM COMMITTEE CALLS UPON YOU TO SUPPORT OUR NON-VIOLENT MARCH FOR JUSTICE THROUGH THE BARRIOS OF THE GREATER LOS ANGELES AREA.

CARAVANS WILL BE COMING FROM DOZENS OF CITIES AND AROUND OUR BARRIOS. WE WILL ALL MEET AT THE E.L.A. SHERIFF'S SUB-STATION ON 3RD STREET BETWEEN FETTERLY AND WOODS. AT 11:00 AM JANUARY 31, 1971. JOIN YOUR LOCAL CARAVAN. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL 268-6745.

—Handbill from the National
Chicano Moratorium Committee

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My first night in the Hotel Ashmun was not restful. The others had left around five, then there was the junkie eruption at seven . . . followed an hour later by a thundering, low-fidelity outburst of wailing Norteno music from the jukebox in the Boulevard Cafe across the street . . . and then, about nine-thirty, I was jerked up again by a series of loud whistles from the sidewalk right under my window, and a voice calling, "Hunter! Wake-up, man! Let's get moving."

Holy jesus! I thought. Only three people in the world know where I am right now, and they're all asleep. Who else could have tracked me to this place? I bent the metal slats of the venetian blind apart just enough to look down at the street and see Rudy Sanchez, Oscar's quiet little bodyguard, looking up at my window and waving urgently: "Come on out, man, it's time. Oscar and Benny are up the street at the Sweetheart. That's the bar on the corner where you see all those people in front. We'll wait for you there, OK? You awake?"

"Sure I'm awake," I said. "I've been sitting here *waiting* for you lazy criminal bastards. Why do Mexicans need so much fucking sleep?"

Rudy smiled and turned away. "We'll be *waiting* for you, man. We're gonna be drinkin a hell of a lot of bloody marys and you know the rule we have down here."

"Never mind that," I muttered. "I need a shower."

But my room had no shower. And somebody, that night, had managed to string a naked copper wire across the bathtub and plug it into a socket underneath the basin outside the bathroom door. For what reason? Demon Rum, I had no idea. Here I was in the best room in the house, looking for the shower and finding only an electrified bathtub. And no place to righteously shave—in the best hotel on the strip. Finally I scrubbed my face with a hot towel and went across the street to the Sweetheart Lounge.

Oscar Acosta, the Chicano lawyer, was there; leaning on the bar, talking idly with some of the patrons. Of the four people around him — all in their late twenties—two were ex-cons, two were part-time dynamite freaks and known fire-bombers, and three of the four were veteran acid-eaters. Yet none of this surfaced in the conversation. The talk was political, but only in terms of the courtroom. Oscar was dealing with two hyper-political trials at the same time.

In one, the trial of the "Biltmore Six," he was defending six young Chicanos who'd been arrested for trying to burn down the Biltmore Hotel one night about a year ago, while Governor Ronald Reagan was delivering a speech there in the ballroom. Their guilt or innocence was immaterial at this point, because the trial had developed into a spectacular attempt to overturn the entire Grand Jury selection system. In the preceding months, Acosta had subpoenaed every Superior Court Judge in Los Angeles County and cross-examined all 109 of them at length, under oath, on the subject of their "racism." It was a wretched affront to the whole court system, and Acosta was working overtime to make it as wretched as possible. Here were these hundred and nine old men, these *judges*, compelled to take time out from whatever they were doing and go into another courtroom to take the stand and deny charges of "racism" from an attorney they all loathed.

Oscar's contention, throughout, was that all Grand Juries are racist, since all grand jurors have to be recommended by Superior Court Judges—who naturally tend to recommend people they know personally or professionally. And that therefore no ratbastard Chicano street crazy, for instance, could possibly be indicted by "a jury of his peers." The implications of a victory in this case were so obvious, so clearly menacing to the court system, that interest in the verdict had filtered all the way down to places like the Boulevard, the Silver Dollar and the Sweetheart. The level of political consciousness is not normally high in these places—especially on Saturday mornings —but Acosta's very presence, no matter where he goes or what he seems to be doing, is so grossly political that anybody who wants to talk to him has to figure out some way to deal on a meaningful political level.

"The thing is to never talk down," he says. "We're not trying to win votes out here. Hell, that trip's been done, it's over. The idea now is to make people *think*. Force them to think. And you can't do that by walking around slapping strangers on the back and buying them beers." Then grinning. "Unless you happen to be babbling drunk or stoned. Which is certainly not my style; I want to make that one thing very clear."

But today the talk was easy, with no ulterior politics. "Say, Oscar," somebody asked. "How do we stand on that Grand Jury thing? What's our chances?"

Acosta shrugged. "We'll win. Maybe not on this level, but we'll win on appeal."

"That's good, man. I hear you're really workin out on the bastards."

"Yeah, we're fuckin em over. But that one might take another year. Right now we have to think about Corky's trial. It starts Tuesday."

"Corky's in town?" The interest is obvious. Heads turn to listen. Rudy eases back a few feet so he can watch the whole bar, scanning the faces for any that might be *too* interested. Paranoia is rampant in the barrio: Informers. Narcs. Assassins — who knows? And Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzales is a definite heavy, prime target for a frame or a set-up. A scholarly, soft-spoken ex-boxer, his Denver-based "Crusade for Justice" is one of the few *viable* Chicano political organizations in the country. Gonzales is a poet, a street-fighter, a theorist, an organizer, and the most influential "Chicano leader" in the country next to Cesar Chavez.

Whenever Corky Gonzales appears in East L.A.—if only to stand trial on a misdemeanor weapons bust—the level of political tension rises noticeably. Gonzales has a very intense following in the barrio. Most of his supporters are young: Students, dropouts, artists, poets, crazies —the people who *respect* Cesar Chavez, but who can't really *relate* to church-going farmworkers.

"This weekend is going to be hell," Oscar had told me the night before. "Whenever Corky's in town, my apartment turns into a fucking zoo. I have to go to a motel to get any sleep. Shit, I can't stay up all night arguing radical politics when I have to be in court the next morning. These wild-eyed fuckers show up at all hours; they bring wine, joints, acid, mescaline, guns . . . Jesus, Corky wouldn't dare take that kind of risk. He's already here, but I don't know where he's staying. He's checked into some kind of goddamn Holiday Inn or something, about five miles out on Rosemeade, but he won't tell anybody where it is—not even me, his lawyer." He smiled, "And that's pretty shrewd, because if I knew where he was I might go over there some night all twisted and crazy about calling a general strike at dawn, or some other dangerous bullshit that would freak him."

He nodded, smiling lazily down at his drink. "As a matter of fact, I *have* been thinking about calling a general strike. The movement is so goddamn splintered right now that almost anything would help. Yeah, maybe I should write Corky a speech along those lines, then call a press conference for tomorrow afternoon in the Silver Dollar." He laughed bitterly and called for another bloody mary.

Acosta has been practicing law in the barrio for three years. I met him a bit earlier than that, in another era—which hardly matters here, except that it might be a trifle less than fair to run this story all the way out to the end without saying at least once, for the record, that Oscar is an old friend and occasional antagonist. I first met him, as I recall, in a bar called "The Daisy Duck" in Aspen, when he lumbered up to me and started raving about "ripping the system apart like a pile of cheap hay," or something like that . . . and I remember thinking, "Well, here's another one of those fucked-up, guilt-crazed dropout lawyers from San Francisco—some dingbat who ate one too many tacos and decided he was really Emiliano Zapata."

Which was OK, I felt, but it was a hard act to handle in Aspen in that high white summer of 1967. That was the era of Sergeant Pepper, the Surrealistic Pillow and the original Buffalo Springfield. It was a good year for everybody—or for *most* people, anyway. There were exceptions, as always. Lyndon Johnson was one, and Oscar Acosta was another. For entirely different reasons. That was not a good summer to be either the President of the United States or any angry Mexican lawyer in Aspen.

Oscar didn't hang around long. He washed dishes for a while, did a bit of construction work, bent the County Judge out of shape a few times, then took off for Mexico to "get serious." The next thing I heard, he was working for the public defender's office in L.A. That was sometime around Christmas of 1968, which was not a good year for anybody —except Richard Nixon and perhaps Oscar Acosta. Because by that time Oscar was beginning to find his own track. He was America's only "Chicano lawyer," he explained in a letter, and he liked it. His clients were all Chicanos and most were "political criminals," he said. And if they were guilty it was only because they were "doing what had to be done."

—*Continued on Next Page*

Annie Leibovitz

Hard rockers . . .

and easy riders . . . along Whittier Boulevard

Rumblings in Aztlan

—*Continued from Preceding Page*

That's fine, I said. But I couldn't really get into it. I was all *for it*, you understand, but only on the basis of a personal friendship. *Most* of my friends are into strange things I don't totally understand—and with a few shameful exceptions I wish them all well. Who am I, after all, to tell some friend he shouldn't change his name to Oliver High, get rid of his family and join a Satanism cult in Seattle? Or to argue with another friend who wants to buy a single-shot Remington Fireball so he can go out and shoot cops from a safe distance?

Whatever's right, I say. Never fuck with a friend's head by accident. And if their private trips get out of control now and then—well, you do what has to be done.

Which more or less explains how I suddenly found myself involved in the murder of Ruben Salazar. I was up in Portland, Oregon at the time, trying to cover the National American Legion Convention and the Sky River Rock Festival at the same time . . . and I came back to my secret room in the Hilton one night to find an "urgent message" to call Mr. Acosta in Los Angeles.

I wondered how he had managed to track me down in Portland. But I knew, somehow, what he was calling about. I had seen the L.A. Times that morning, with the story of Salazar's death, and even at a distance of 2000 miles it gave off a powerful stench. The problem was not just a gimp or a hole in the story; the whole goddamn thing was wrong. It made no sense at all.

The Salazar case had a very special hook in it: Not that he was a Mexican or a Chicano, and not even Acosta's angry insistence that the cops had killed him in cold blood and that nobody was going to do anything about it. These were all proper ingredients for an outrage, but from my own point of view the most ominous aspect of Oscar's story was his charge that the police had deliberately gone out on the streets and killed a reporter who'd been giving them trouble. If this was true, it meant the ante was being upped drastically. When the cops declare open season on journalists, when they feel free to declare any scene of "unlawful protest" a free fire zone, that will be a very ugly day—and not just for journalists.

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For thirteen devastated blocks, darkened stores stood gaping, show windows smashed. Traffic signs, spent shotgun shells, chunks of brick and concrete littered the pavement. A pair of sofas, gutted by fire, smouldered at a curbside splashed with blood. In the hot blaze of police flares, three Chicano youths swaggered down the ruined street. "Hey brother," one yelled to a black reporter, "was this better than Watts?"

—Newsweek, Feb. 15, '71

Ruben Salazar is a bonafide martyr now—not only in East L.A., but in Denver and Santa Fe and San Antonio, throughout the Southwest. The length and breadth of Aztlan—the "conquered territories" that came under the yoke of Gringo occupation troops more than 100 years ago, when "vendido politicians in Mexico City sold out to the US" in order to call off the invasion that Gringo history books refer to as the "Mexican-American War." (Davy Crockett, Remember the Alamo, etc.)

As a result of this war, the US government was ceded about half of what was then the Mexican nation. This territory was eventually broken up into what is now the states of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and the southern half of California. This is Aztlan, more a concept than a real definition. But even as a concept it has galvanized a whole generation of young Chicanos to a style of political action that literally terrifies their Mexican-American parents. Between 1968 and 1970 the "Mexican-American Movement" went through the same drastic changes and heavy trauma that had earlier afflicted the "Negro Civil Rights Movement" in the early Sixties. The split was mainly along generational lines, and the first "young radicals" were overwhelmingly the sons and daughters of middle-class Mexican-Americans who had learned to live with "their problem."

At this stage, the Movement was basically intellectual. The word "Chicano" was forged as a necessary identity for the people of Aztlan—neither Mexicans nor Americans, but a conquered Indian/Mestizo nation sold out like slaves by its leaders and treated like indentured servants by its conquerers. Not even their language was definable, much less their identity. The language of East L.A. is a speedy sort of *cholo* mixture of Mexican Spanish and California English. You can sit in the Boulevard Cafe on Whittier on a Saturday morning and hear a young Chicano ex-con explaining to his friends: "This goddamn gabacho parole officer tells me I have to get the sewing machine back. I talked to that goddamn vendido and the vieja tambien, and they tell me don't worry, we won't say nothing that would send you back to the joint. But the gabacho keeps pushin me. What can I do?" And then, suddenly noticing a vagrant gringo nearby, he finishes the whole story in rapid, angry Spanish.

There are a lot of ex-cons in the Movement now, along with a whole new element — the "*Batos Locos*." And the only difference, really, is that the ex-cons are old enough to have done time for the same things the *batos locos* haven't been arrested for, yet. Another difference is that the ex-cons are old enough to frequent the action bars along Whittier, while most of the *batos locos* are still teenagers. They drink heavily, but not in the Boulevard or the Silver Dollar. On Friday night you will find them sharing quarts of sweet Key Largo in the darkness of some playground in the housing project. And along with the wine, they eat seconal—which is massively available in the barrio, and also cheap: a buck or so for a rack of five reds, enough to fuck *anybody* up. Seconal is one of the few drugs on the market (legal or otherwise) that is flat guaranteed to turn you *mean*. Especially with wine on the side and a few "whites," bennies, for a chaser. This is the kind of diet that makes a man want to go out and stomp people . . . the only other people I've ever seen heavily into the red/white/wine diet were the Hell's Angels.

The results are about the same. The Angels would get loaded and then snarl around looking for somebody to chain-whip. The *batos locos* get loaded and start looking for their own kind of action (burning a store, rat-packing a nigger, or stealing some cars for a night of high-speed cruising on the freeways). The action is almost always illegal, usually violent—but only recently has it become "political."

Perhaps the main Movement/focus in the barrio these days is the politicalization of the *batos locos*. The term translates literally as "crazy guys," but in harsh political terms it translates as "street crazies," teenage wildmen who have nothing to lose except their hostility and a vast sense of doom and boredom with the world as they know it. "These guys aren't afraid of the pigs," a Chicano activist told me. "Hell, they *like* a fight with the pigs. They *want* it. And there's a hell of a lot of 'em, man. Maybe two hundred thousand. If we can organize these guys, man, we can move on *anybody*."

But the *batos locos* are not easily organized. For one thing, they're hopelessly ignorant about politics. They hate politicians—even Chicano politicians. They are also very young, very hostile, and when you get them excited they are likely to do almost anything—especially when they're full of wine and reds. One of the first overt attempts to bring the *batos locos* into the new Chicano politics was the mass rally against police brutality last January 31st. The organizers took great care to make sure the thing would be peaceful. The word went out all over the barrio that "this one has to be cool —no riot, no violence." A truce was arranged with the East L.A. sheriff's dept.; the cops agreed to "keep a low profile," but they nonetheless sand-bagged and barricaded the sheriff's sub-station right next to the site of the rally in Belvedere Park.

Writing in The Nation, a Chicago priest named David F. Gomez described the scene as the rally gathered steam: "Despite the tension, a fiesta atmosphere prevailed as Chicanos sat on the scarred grass of the park's soccer field and listened while barrio speakers aired grievances of police brutality and the gringo occupation of Aztlan. Oscar Acosta gave the most rousing talk of the afternoon. *'Ya es tiempo.* The time is now! There's only one issue. Not police abuse. We are going to be clubbed over the head for as long as we live because we're Chicanos! The real issue is *nuestra tierra,* our land. Some people call us rebels and revolutionaries. Don't believe it. Emiliano Zapata was a revolutionary because he fought against other Mexicans. But we are not fighting our own people but gringos! We are not trying to overturn our own government. We don't have a government! Do you think there would be police helicopters patrolling our communities day and night if anybody considered us real citizens with rights!' "

Oscar Zeta Acosta, Chicano lawyer

The rally *was* peaceful — all the way to the end. But then, when fighting broke out between a handful of Chicanos and jittery cops, nearly a thousand young *batos locos* reacted by making a frontal assault on the cop headquarters with rocks, bottles, clubs, bricks and everything else they could find. The cops withstood the attack for about an hour, then swarmed out of the place with a stunning show of force that included firing deadly buckshot balls out of 12-gauge shotguns straight into the crowd. The attackers fled through the backstreets to Whittier Boulevard, and trashed the street again. The cops pursued, firing shotguns and pistols at point blank range. After two hours of street warfare, the toll was one dead, 30 serious injuries and a little less than a half million dollars worth of damage—including 78 burned and battered police cars.

The entire L.A. power structure was outraged. And the Chicano Moratorium Committee was aghast. The rally's main organizer—24-year-old Rosalio Munoz, a former president of the UCLA student body—was so shocked by the outburst that he reluctantly agreed — with the sheriff — that any further mass rallies would be too dangerous. "We will have to find a new way of expressing grievances," said a spokesman for the more moderate Congress of Mexican-American Unity. "From now on the course will be to play a low profile."

But nobody spoke for the *batos locos* —except maybe the sheriff. "This violence was not caused by outsiders," he said, "but by members of the Chicano community! They can't say we provoked them this time." This was a definite switch from the standard-brand cop-

analysis of "Mexican violence." In the past they had always blamed it on "Communists and Outside Agitators." But now, it seemed, the sheriff was finally catching on. The real enemy was the same people his men had to deal with every goddamn day of the week, in all kinds of routine situations—on street-corners, in bars, domestic brawls and car accidents. The *gente,* the street-people, the ones who *live* there. So in the end, being a sheriff's deputy in East L.A. was not much different from being a point man for the Americal Division in Vietnam. "Even the kids and old women are VC."

This is the new drift, and everybody in East L.A. who's willing to talk about it uses the term "since Salazar." In the six months since the murder and the unsettling coroner's inquest that followed it up, the Chicano community has been harshly sundered by a completely new kind of polarization, another painful amoeba-trip. But the split this time was not between the young militants and the old Tio Tacos; this time it was between student-type militants and this whole new breed of super-militant street crazies. The argument was no longer *whether* to fight —but When, and How, and with What Weapons.

Another awkward aspect of the new split was that it was no longer a simple matter of "the generation gap"—which had been painful, but essentially simple; now it was more than a conflict of lifestyles and attitudes; the division this time was more along economic, or *class* lines. And this was painfully complex. The original student activists had been militant, but also reasonable—in their own eyes, if not in the eyes of the law.

But the *batos locos* never even pretended to be reasonable. They wanted to get it on, and the sooner the better. Anytime, anywhere: Just give us a reason to work out on the pig, and we're ready.

This attitude created definite problems within the movement. The street people had right instincts, said the leadership, but they were not wise. They had no program; only violence and vengeance—which was wholly understandable, of course, but how could it *work?* How could the traditionally stable Mexican-American community gain anything, in the long run, by declaring total war on the gabacho power structure and meanwhile purging its own native *vendidos?*

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AZTLAN! Love it or leave it.
—sign at Chicano rally

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Ruben Salazar was killed in the wake of a Watts-style riot that erupted when hundreds of cops attacked a peaceful rally in Laguna Park, where 5000 or so liberal/student/activist type Chicanos had gathered to protest the drafting of "Aztlan citizens" to fight for the US in Vietnam. The police suddenly appeared in Laguna Park, with no warning, and "dispersed the crowd" with a blanket of tear gas, followed up by a Chicago-style mop-up with billyclubs. The crowd fled in panic and anger, inflaming hundreds of young spectators who ran the few blocks to Whittier Boulevard and began trashing every store in sight. Several buildings were burned to the ground; damage was estimated at somewhere around a million dollars. Three people were killed, 60 injured—but the central incident of that August 29th, 1970 rally was the killing of Ruben Salazar.

And six months later, when the National Chicano Moratorium Committee felt it was time for another mass rally, they called it to "carry on the spirit of Ruben Salazar."

There is irony in this, because Salazar was nobody's militant. He was a professional journalist with ten years of experience on a variety of assignments for the neo-liberal Los Angeles Times. He was a nationally known reporter, winning prizes for his work in places like Vietnam, Mexico City and the Dominican Republic. Ruben Salazar was a veteran war correspondent, but he had never shed blood under fire. He was good, and he seemed to like the work. So he must have been slightly bored when the Times called him back from the war zones, for a raise and a well-deserved rest covering "local affairs."

He focused on the huge barrio just east of city hall. This was a scene he had never really known, despite his Mexican-American heritage. But he locked into it almost instantly. Within months, he had narrowed his work for the Times down to a once-a-week column for the newspaper, and signed on as News Director for KMEX-TV—the "Mexican-American station," which he quickly transformed into an energetic, aggressively political voice for the whole Chicano community. His coverage of police activities made the East Los Angeles sheriff's dept. so unhappy that they soon found themselves in a sort of running private argument with this man Salazar, this Spic who refused to be reasonable. When Salazar got onto a routine story like some worthless kid named Ramirez getting beaten to death in a jail-fight, he was likely to come up with almost anything—including a series of hard-hitting news commentaries strongly suggesting that the victim had been beaten to death by the jailers. In the summer of 1970 Ruben Salazar was warned three times, by the cops, to "tone down his coverage." And each time he told them to fuck off.

This was not common knowledge in the community until after he was murdered. When he went out to cover the rally that August afternoon he was still a "Mexican-American journalist." But by the time his body was carried out of the Silver Dollar, he was a stone Chicano martyr. Salazar would have smiled at this irony, but he would not have seen much humor in the way the story of his death was handled by the cops and the politicians. Nor would he have been pleased to know that almost immediately after his death his name would become a battle cry, prodding thousands of young Chicanos who had always disdained "protest" into an undeclared war with the hated gringo police.

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His paper, the L.A. Times, carried the account of its former foreign correspondent's death on its Monday front page: "Mexican-American newsman Ruben Salazar was killed by a bullet-like tear gas shell fired by a sheriff's deputy into a bar during rioting Saturday in East Los Angeles." The details were hazy, but the new, hastily revised police version was clearly constructed to show that Salazar was the victim of a Regrettable Accident which the cops were not aware of until many hours later. Sheriff's deputies had cornered an armed man in a bar, they said, and when he refused to come out—even after "loud warnings" (with a bull horn) "to evacuate"—"the tear gas shells were fired and several persons ran out the back door."

At that time, according to the sheriff's nervous mouthpiece, Lt. Norman Hamilton, a woman and two men—one carrying a 7.65 automatic pistol—were met by deputies, who questioned them. "I don't know whether the man with the gun was arrested on a weapons violation or not," Hamilton added.

Ruben Salazar was not among those persons who ran out the back door. He was lying on the floor, inside, with a huge hole in his head. But the police didn't know this, Lieutenant Hamilton explained, because, "they didn't enter the bar until approximately 8 PM, when rumors began circulating that Salazar was missing," and "an unidentified man across the street from the bar" told a deputy, "I think there's an injured man in there." "At this point," said Hamilton, "deputies knocked down the door and found the body." Two and a half hours later, at 10:40 PM, the sheriff's office admitted that "the body" was Ruben Salazar.

"Hamilton could not explain," said the Times, "why two accounts of the incident given to the Times by avowed eyewitnesses differed from the sheriff's accounts."

For about 24 hours Hamilton clung grimly to his original story—a composite, he said, of firsthand police accounts. According to this version, Ruben Salazar had been "killed by errant gunfire ... during the height of a sweep of more than 7000 people in (Laguna) Park when police ordered everyone to disperse." Local TV and radio newscasts offered sporadic variations on this theme —citing reports "still under investigation" that Salazar had been shot accidentally by careless street-snipers. It was tragic, of course, but tragedies like this are inevitable when crowds of innocent people allow themselves to be manipulated by a handful of violent, cop-hating anarchists.

By late Sunday, however, the sheriff's story had collapsed completely—in the face of sworn testimony from four men who were standing within ten feet of Ruben Salazar when he died in the Silver Dollar Cafe at 4045 Whittier Boulevard, at least a mile from Laguna Park. But the real shocker came when these men testified that Salazar had been killed—not by snipers or errent gunfire—but by a cop with a deadly tear gas bazooka.

Acosta had no trouble explaining the discrepancy. "They're lying," he said. "They *murdered* Salazar and now they're trying to cover it up. The sheriff already panicked. All he can say is, 'No comment.' He's ordered every cop in the county to *say nothing* to anybody—especially the press. They've turned the East L.A. sheriff's station into a fortress. Armed guards all around it." He laughed. "Shit, the place looks like a prison—but with all the cops *inside!*"

Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess refused to talk to me when I called. The rude aftermath of the Salazar killing had apparently unhinged him completely. On Monday he called off a scheduled press conference and instead issued a statement, saying: "There are just too many conflicting stories, some from our own officers, as to what happened. The sheriff wants an opportunity to digest them before meeting with newsmen."

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Indeed. Sheriff Pitchess was not alone in his inability to digest the garbled swill that his office was doling out. The official version of the Salazar killing was so crude and illogical—even after revisions —that not even the sheriff seemed surprised when it began to fall apart even before Chicano partisans had a chance to attack it. Which they would, of course. The sheriff had already got wind of what was coming: many eyewitnesses, sworn statements, first-hand accounts — all of them hostile.

The history of Chicano complaints against cops in East L.A. is not a happy one. "The cops never lose," Acosta told me, "and they won't lose this one either. They just murdered the only guy in the community they were really afraid of, and I guarantee you no cop will ever stand trial for it. Not even for manslaughter."

I could accept that. But it was difficult, even for me, to believe that the cops had killed him deliberately. I knew they were capable of it, but I was not quite ready to believe they had actually done it ... because once I believed that, I also had to accept the idea that they are prepared to kill anybody who seemed to be annoying them. Even me.

As for Acosta's charge of murder, I knew him well enough to understand how he could make that charge *publicly* ... I also knew him well enough to be sure he wouldn't try to hang that kind of monstrous bullshit on me. So our phone talk naturally disturbed me ... and I fell to brooding about it, hung on my own dark suspicions that Oscar had told me the truth.

On the plane to L.A. I tried to make some kind of a case—either pro or con—from my bundle of notes and newsclips relating to Salazar's death. By that time at least six reportedly reliable witnesses had made sworn statements that differed drastically, on several crucial points, with the original police version—which nobody believed anyway. There was something very disturbing about the sheriff's account of that accident; it wasn't even a good *lie.*

Within hours after the Times hit the streets with the news that Ruben Salazar had in fact been killed by cops—rather than street snipers—the sheriff unleashed a furious assault on "known dissidents" who had flocked into East Los Angeles that weekend, he said, to provoke a disastrous riot in the Mexican-American community. He praised his deputies for the skillful zeal they displayed in restoring order to the area within two and a half hours, "thus averting a major holocaust of much greater proportions."

Pitchess did not identify any "known dissidents," but he insisted that they had committed "hundreds of provocative acts." For some reason the sheriff failed to mention that his deputies had already jailed one of the most prominent Chicano militants in the nation. "Corky" Gonzales had been arrested during Saturday's riot on a variety of charges that the police never really explained. Gonzales, fleeing the combat zone on a flatbed truck with 28 others, was arrested first for a traffic violation, then on a concealed weapons charge and finally for "suspicion of robbery" when police found $300 in his pocket. Police Inspector John Kinsling said it was a "routine" booking. "Any time we stop a traffic case and find that there is a weapon in the car and that its occupants have a sizeable amount of money," he said, "we always book them for suspicion of robbery."

Gonzales ridiculed the charge, saying, "Anytime a Mexican is found with more than $100 he's charged with a felony." The police had originally claimed he was carrying a loaded pistol and more than 1000 rounds of ammunition, along with many spent cartridges—but by Wednesday all felony charges had been dropped. As for "robbery," Gonzales said, "Only a lunatic or a fool could believe that 29 people would rob a place and then jump on a flatbed truck to make their getaway." He had climbed aboard the truck with his two children, he said, to get them away from the cops who were gassing the rally, to which he'd been invited as one of the main speakers. The $300, he said, was expense money for himself and his children—for meals in L.A. and three round-trip bus tickets from Denver.

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That was the extent of Corky Gonzales' involvement in the Salazar incident, and at a glance it seems hardly worth mentioning—except for a rumor on the Los Angeles lawyers' grapevine that the robbery charge was only a ruse, a necessary holding action, to set Gonzales up for a "Chicano Seven" conspiracy bust—charging that he came from Denver to Los Angeles with the intension of causing a riot.

Both Sheriff Pitchess and Los Angeles Police Chief Edward Davis were quick to

—*Continued on Next Page*

Annie Leibovitz

Fine bargains in Fat City . . . just a bozooka shot down the Boulevard from your favorite neighborhood tavern

Rumblings in Aztlan

—Continued from Preceding Page

seize on this theory. It was the perfect tool for this problem: not only would it frighten the local Chicanos and hamstring nationally-known militants like Gonzales, but it could also be used to create a sort of "red menace" smokescreen to obscure the nasty realities of the Ruben Salazar killing.

The sheriff fired the first salvo, which earned him a giant banner headline in Tuesday's L.A. Times and a heavy pro-police editorial in Wednesday's Herald-Examiner. Meanwhile, Chief Davis launched a second blast from his listening post in Portland, where he had gone to vent his wisdom at the American Legion convention. Davis blamed all the violence, that Saturday, on a "hard core group of subversives who infiltrated the anti-war rally and turned it into a mob," which soon ran wild in a frenzy of burning and looting. "Ten months ago," he explained, "the Communist Party in California said it was giving up on the blacks to concentrate on the Mexican-Americans."

Nowhere in the Herald editorial—and nowhere in either statement by the sheriff and the police chief—was there any mention of the name Ruben Salazar. The Herald, in fact, had been trying to ignore the Salazar story from the very beginning. Even in Sunday's first story on the riot—long before any "complications" developed—the classic Hearst mentality was evident in the paper's full-page headline: "East Los Angeles Peace Rally Explodes in Bloody Violence . . . Man Shot to Death; Buildings Looted, Burned." Salazar's name appeared briefly, in a statement by a spokesman for the L.A. County sheriff's department — a calm and confident assertion that the "veteran reporter" had been shot in Laguna Park, by persons unknown, in the midst of a bloody clash between police and militants. So much for Ruben Salazar.

And so much for the Los Angeles Herald-Examiner — a genuinely rotten newspaper that claims the largest circulation of any afternoon daily in America. As one of the few remaining Hearst organs, it serves a perverted purpose in its role as a monument to everything cheap, corrupt and vicious in the realm of journalistic possibility. It is hard to understand, in fact, how the shriveled Hearst management can still find enough gimps, bigots and deranged Papists to staff a rotten paper like the Herald. But they manage, somehow . . . and they also manage to sell a lot of advertising in the monster. Which means the thing is actually being read, and perhaps taken seriously, by hundreds of thousands of people in America's second largest city. At the top of Wednesday's editorial page—right next to the Red Menace warning—was a large cartoon titled "At the Bottom of it All." It showed a flaming Molotov cocktail crashing through a window, and on the bottom (*bottom*, get it?) of the bottle is a hammer and sickle emblem. The editorial itself was a faithful echo of the Davis - Pitchess charges: "Many of the dissidents came here from other cities and states to join agitators in Los Angeles to set off a major riot, which was planned in advance . . . That the holocaust did not erupt into greater proportions is due to the bravery and tactics of the sheriff's deputies . . . Those arrested should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Precautions must be doubled to prevent a recurrence of such criminal irresponsibility." The continued existence of the Hearst Examiner explains a lot about the mentality of Los Angeles—and also, perhaps, about the murder of Ruben Salazar.

So the only way to go was to reconstruct the whole thing on the basis of available eyewitness testimony. The police refused to say anything at all—especially to the press. The sheriff said he was saving "the truth" for the official coroner's inquest.

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Meanwhile, evidence was building up that Ruben Salazar had been murdered—either deliberately or for no reason at all. The most damaging anti-cop testimony thus far had come from Guillermo Restrepo, a 28-year-old reporter and newscaster for KMEX-TV, who was covering the "riot" with Salazar that afternoon, and who had gone with him into the Silver Dollar Cafe "to take a leak and drink a quick beer before we went back to the station to put the story together." Restrepo's testimony was solid enough on its own to cast a filthy shadow on the original police version, but when he produced two *more* eyewitnesses who told exactly the same story, the sheriff abandoned all hope and sent his scriptwriters back to the sty.

Guillermo Restrepo is well known in East L.A.—a familiar figure to every Chicano who owns a TV set. Restrepo is to get back inside the bar if he didn't want to be shot.

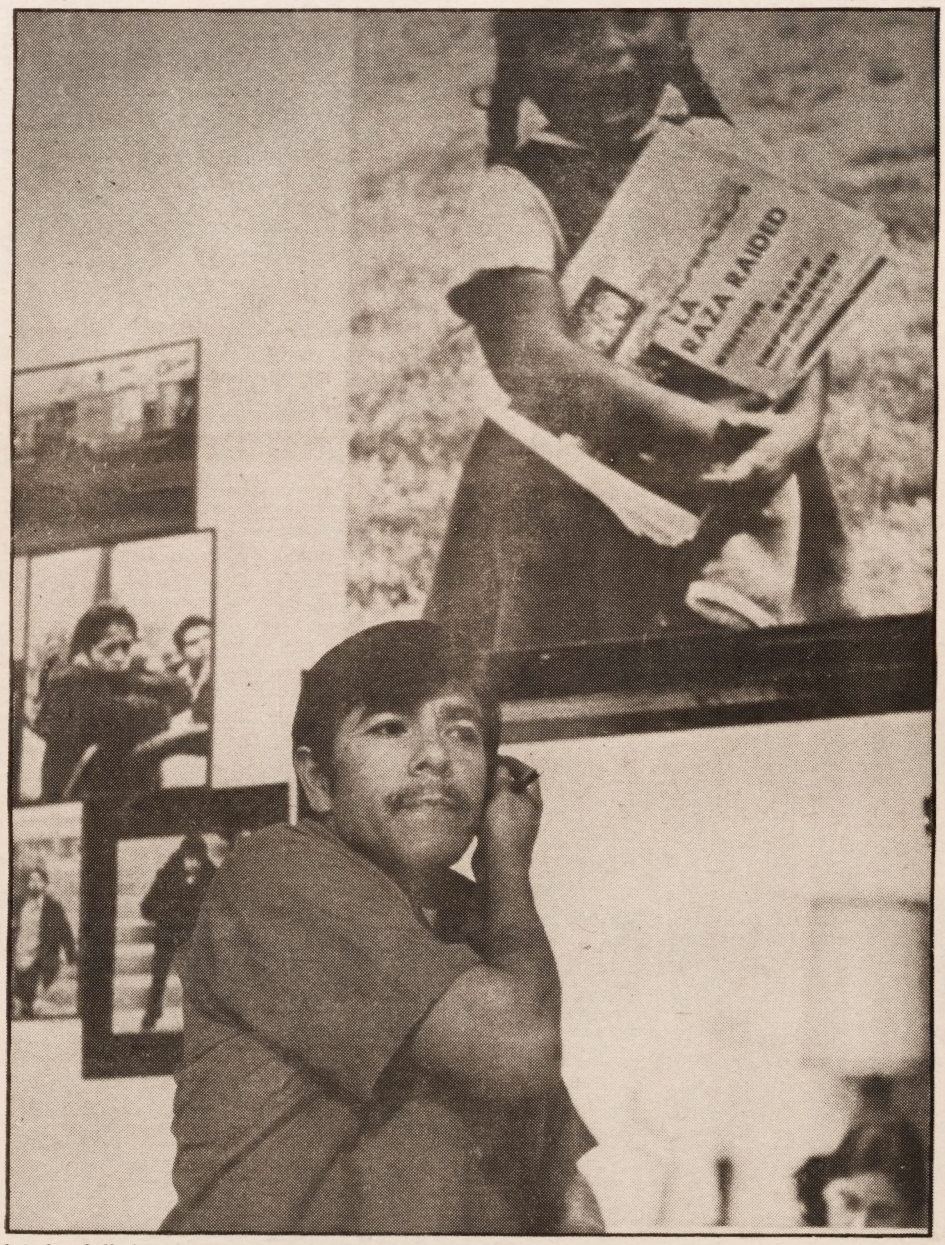
The sheriff's office was not aware of this photo until three days after it was taken—along with a dozen others—by two *more* eyewitnesses, who also happened to be editors of La Raza, a militant Chicano newspaper that calls itself "the voice of the East L.A. barrio." (Actually, it is one of several: The Brown Berets publish a monthly tabloid called La Causa. The National La Raza Law Students' Association has its own monthly—Justicia O! The Socialist Workers Party covers the barrio with The Militant and the East L.A. Welfare Rights Organization has its own tabloid —La Causa de los Pobres. There is also Con Safos—a quarterly review of Chicano Art and Literature.)

The photographs were taken by Raul Ruiz, a 28-year-old teacher of Latin American studies at San Fernando Valley State College. Ruiz was on assignment for La Raza that day when the rally turned into a street war with the police. He and Joe Razo—a 33-year-old law student with an M.A. in psychology —were following the action along Whittier Boulevard when they noticed a task force of sheriff's deputies preparing to assault the Silver Dollar Cafe.

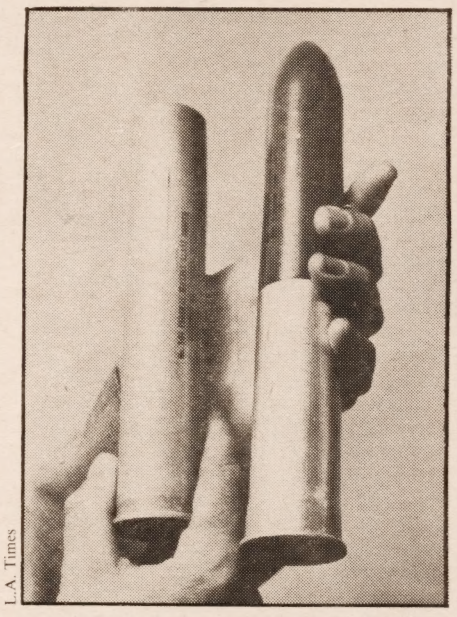
Their accounts of what happened there —along with Ruiz's photos—were published in La Raza three days after the sheriff's office said Salazar had been killed a mile away in Laguna Park, by snipers and/or "errant gunfire."

The La Raza spread was a bombshell.

Annie Leibovitz



L.A. Times



The shell (right) that killed Ruben Salazar . . . Joe Razo, who edits La Raza . . . sheriff's deputies approaching the Silver Dollar

The weakness in the Restrepo-Garcia-Franco testimony was so obvious that not even the cops could miss it. They knew nothing beyond what had happened *inside* the Silver Dollar at the time of Salazar's death. There was no way they could have known what was happening *outside*, or *why* the cops started shooting.

The explanation came almost instantly from the sheriff's office — once again from Lt. Hamilton. The police had received an "anonymous report," he said, that "a man with a gun" was inside the Silver Dollar Cafe. This was the extent of their "probable cause," their reason for doing what they did. These actions, according to Hamilton, consisted of "sending several deputies" to deal with the problem . . . and they did so by stationing themselves in front of the Silver Dollar and issuing "a loud warning" with a bullhorn calling all those inside to come outside with their hands above their heads.

There was no response, Hamilton said, so a deputy then fired two tear gas projectiles into the bar through the front door. At this point two men and a woman fled out the back and one of the men was relieved by waiting deputies of a 7.65 caliber pistol. He was not arrested —not even detained—and at that point a deputy fired two more tear gas projectiles through the front door of the place.

Again there was no response, and after a 15-minute wait one of the braver deputies crept up and skillfully slammed the front door—*without entering*, Hamilton added. The only person who actually entered the bar, according to the police version, was the owner, Pete Hernandez, who showed up about half an hour after the shooting and asked if he could go inside and get his rifle.

Why not? said the cops, so Hernandez went in the *back door* and got his rifle out of the rear storeroom—about 50 feet away from where Ruben Salazar's body lay in a fog of rancid CS gas.

Then, for the next two hours, some two dozen sheriff's deputies cordoned off the street in front of the Silver Dollar's front door. This naturally attracted a crowd of curious Chicanos, not all of them friendly—and one, an 18-year-old girl, was shot in the leg with the same kind of tear gas bazooka that had blown Ruben Salazar's head apart.

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This is a fascinating tale . . . and perhaps the most interesting thing about it is that it makes no sense at all, not even to a person willing to accept it as the absolute truth. But who could possibly believe it? Here, in the middle of a terrible riot in a hostile ghetto with a Chicano population of more than a million, the Los Angeles sheriff's department had put every available man on the streets in a vain attempt to control the mass looting and arson by angry mobs . . . but somehow, with the riots still running in high gear, at least a dozen deputies from the elite Special Enforcement Bureau (read TAC Squad) are instantly available in response to an "anonymous report" that "a man with a gun" is holed up, for some reason, in an otherwise quiet cafe more than ten blocks away from the vortex of the actual rioting.

They swoop down on the place and confront several men trying to leave. They threaten to kill these men—but make no attempt to either arrest or search them—and force them all back inside. Then they use a bullhorn to warn

The photos weren't much individually, but together — along with Ruiz/Razo testimony—they showed that the cops were still lying when they came up with their second (revised) version of the Salazar killing.

It also verified the Restrepo-Garcia-Franco testimony, which had already shot down the original police version by establishing, beyond any doubt, that Ruben Salazar had been killed, by a deputy sheriff, in the Silver Dollar Cafe. They were certain of *that*, but no more. They were puzzled, they said, when the cops appeared with guns and began threatening them. But they decided to leave anyway—by the back door, since the cops wouldn't let anybody out of the front—and that was when the shooting started, less than 30 seconds after Garcia was photographed in front of that shotgun barrel on the sidewalk.

Their names were Gustavo Garcia, age 30, and Hector Fabio Franco, also 30. Both men appear in a photograph (taken seconds before Salazar was killed) of a sheriff's deputy pointing a shotgun at the front door of the Silver Dollar Cafe. Garcia is the man right in front of the gun. When the picture was taken he had just asked the cop what was going on, and the cop had just told him

They worked well together, and on that Saturday when the Chicano "peace rally" turned into a Watts-style street riot, both Salazar and Restrepo decided that it might be wise if Restrepo—a native Columbian — brought two of his friends (also Columbians) to help out as spotters and de facto bodyguards.

the out-front public face of KMEX-TV news . . . and Ruben Salazar, until August 29, 1970, was the man behind the news —the editor.

everybody inside to come out with their hands up. And then, almost instantly after giving the warning, they fire—through the open front door of the place and from a distance of no more than 10 feet—two highpowered tear gas projectiles designed "for use against barricaded criminals" and capable of piercing a one-inch pine board at 300 feet.

Then, when a man carrying an automatic pistol tries to flee out the back door, they take his gun and tell him to get lost. Finally, after firing two more gas bombs through the front door, they seal the place up—without ever entering it—and stand around outside for the next two hours, blocking a main boulevard and attracting a large crowd. After two hours of this madness, they "hear a rumor" — again from an anonymous source—that there might be an injured man inside the bar they sealed off two hours ago. So they "break down the door" and find the body of an eminent journalist—"the only Chicano in East L.A.," according to Acosta, "that the cops were really afraid of."

Incredible as it seems, the sheriff decided to stick with this story — despite a growing body of eyewitness accounts that contradict the police version of "probable cause." The police say they went to the Silver Dollar Cafe to arrest that "man with a gun." But eight days after the killing they were still trying to locate the source of this fatal tip.

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Two weeks later at the coroner's inquest, the sheriff's key witness on this critical point mysteriously appeared. He was a 50-year-old man named Manuel Lopez who claimed all credit for the tip with his tale of having seen two armed men—one with a revolver and one carrying a rifle in the port arms position—go into the Silver Dollar shortly before Salazar was killed. Lopez quickly "motioned to" the sheriff's officers stationed nearby, he said, and they responded by parking a patrol car directly across the six-lane boulevard from the Silver Dollar's front door. Then using a loud bullhorn, the deputies gave two distinct warnings for everybody in the bar to "throw out their weapons and come out with their hands over their heads."

Then, after a five or ten-minute wait, Lopez said, three rounds of tear gas were fired at the bar, with one projectile glancing off the front doorway and two whooshing through a black curtain that was hanging a couple of feet back from the open doorway. It was too dark to see what was happening inside the bar, Lopez added.

By his own admission at the inquest, Lopez' behavior on the afternoon of Saturday, August 29th, was somewhat singular. When the riot broke out and mobs began looting and burning, Mr. Lopez took off his shirt, donned a fluorescent red hunting vest and stationed himself in the middle of Whittier Boulevard as a volunteer cop. He played the role with such zeal and fanatic energy that by nightfall he found himself famous. At the height of the violence he was seen dragging a bus bench into the middle of the boulevard in order to block all traffic and divert it off to side streets. He was also seen herding bystanders away from a burning furniture store . . . and later, when the riot-action seemed over, he was observed directing a group of sheriff's deputies toward the Silver Dollar Cafe.

Indeed, there was no arguing with his claim two weeks later that he had been right in the middle of things. His testimony at the inquest sounded perfectly logical and so finely informed that it was hard to understand how such a prominent extroverted witness could possibly have escaped being quoted—or at least mentioned—by the dozens of newsmen, investigators and assorted tipsters with access to the Salazar story. Lopez' name had not even been mentioned by the sheriff's office, which could have saved itself a lot of unnecessary public grief by even *hinting* that they had a witness as valuable as Manuel Lopez. They had not been reluctant to display their other two "friendly" witnesses— neither of whom had seen any "men with guns," but they both backed the Lopez version of the actual shooting sequence. Or at least they backed it until the cops produced Lopez. Then the other two witnesses refused to testify at the Coroner's inquest and one of them admitted that his real name was David Ross Ricci, although the police had introduced him originally as "Rick Ward."

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The Salazar inquest rumbled on for 16 days, attracting large crowds and live TV coverage from start to finish. (In a rare demonstration of non-profit unity, all seven local TV stations formed a combine of sorts, assigning the coverage on a rotating basis, so that each day's proceedings appeared on a different channel.) The L.A. Times coverage—by Paul Houston and Dave Smith —was so complete and often so rife with personal intensity that the collected Smith/Houston file reads like a finely-detailed non-fiction novel. Read separately, the articles are merely good journalism. But as a document, arranged chronologically, the file is more than the sum of its parts. The main theme seems to emerge almost reluctantly, as both reporters are driven to the obvious conclusion that the sheriff, along with his deputies and all his official allies, have been *lying* all along. This is never actually stated, but the evidence is overwhelming.

A coroner's inquest is not a trial. Its purpose is to determine the circumstances surrounding a person's death—not who might have killed him, or why. If the circumstances indicate foul play, the next step is up to the D.A. In California a coroner's jury can reach only two possible verdicts: That the death was "accidental," or that it was "at the hands of another." And in the Salazar case, the sheriff and his allies *needed* a verdict of "accidental." Anything else would leave the case open—not only to the possibility of a murder or manslaughter trial for the deputy, Tom Wilson, who finally admitted firing the death weapon; but also to the threat of a million-dollar negligence lawsuit against the County by Salazar's widow.

The verdict finally hinged on whether or not the jury could believe Wilson's testimony that he fired into the Silver Dollar—at the *ceiling*—in order to ricochet a tear gas shell into the rear of the bar and force the armed stranger inside to come out the front door. But somehow Ruben Salazar had managed to get his head in the way of that carefully aimed shell. Wilson had never been able to figure out, he said, what went wrong.

Nor could he figure out how Raul Ruiz had managed to "doctor" those photographs that made it look like he and at least one other deputy were aiming their weapons straight into the Silver Dollar, pointing them directly at people's heads. Ruiz had no trouble explaining it. His testimony at the inquest was no different than the story he had told me just a few days after the murder. And when the inquest was over there was nothing in the 2025 pages of testimony—from 61 witnesses and 204 exhibits—to cast any serious doubt on the "Chicano Eyewitness Report" that Ruiz wrote for La Raza when the sheriff was still maintaining that Salazar had been killed by "errant gunfire" during the violence at Laguna Park.

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The inquest ended with a split verdict. Smith's lead paragraph in the October 6th Times read like an obituary: "Monday the inquest into the death of newsman Ruben Salazar ended. The 16-day inquiry, by far the longest and costliest such affair in county history, concluded with a verdict that confuses many, satisfies few and means little. The coroner's jury came up with two verdicts: death was 'at the hands of another person' (four jurors) and death was by 'accident' (three jurors). Thus, inquests might appear to be a waste of time."

A week later, District Attorney Evelle Younger—a staunch Law & Order man —announced that he had reviewed the case and decided that "no criminal charge is justified," despite the unsettling fact two of the three jurors who had voted for the "death by accident" verdict were now saying they had made a mistake.

But by that time nobody really gave a damn. The Chicano community had lost faith in the inquest about midway through the second day, and all the rest of the testimony only reinforced their anger at what most considered an evil whitewash. When the D.A. announced that no charges would be filed against Wilson, several of the more moderate Chicano spokesmen called for a federal investigation. The militants called for an uprising. And the cops said nothing at all.

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There was one crucial question, however, that the inquest settled beyond any reasonable doubt. Ruben Salazar couldn't possibly have been the victim of a conscious, high-level cop conspiracy to get rid of him by staging an "accidental death." The incredible tale of half-mad stupidity and dangerous incompetence on every level of the law enforcement establishment was perhaps the most valuable thing to come out of the inquest. Nobody who heard that testimony could believe that the Los Angeles County Sheriff's department is capable of pulling off a delicate job like killing a newsman *on purpose*. Their handling of the Salazar case—from the day of his death all the way to the end of the inquest—raised serious doubts about the wisdom of allowing cops to walk around loose on the street. A geek who can't hit a 20 foot wide ceiling is not what you need, these days, to pull off a nice clean first-degree murder.

But premeditation is only necessary to a charge of *first degree* murder. The Salazar killing was a second-degree job. In the terms of Section 187 of the California Penal Code and in the political context of East Los Angeles in 1970, Ruben Salazar was killed "unlawfully" and "with malice aforethought." These are treacherous concepts, and no doubt there are courts in this country where it might be argued successfully that a cop has a "lawful" right to fire a deadly tear gas bazooka point-blank into a crowd of innocent people on the basis of some unfounded suspicion that one of them *might* be armed. It might also be argued that this kind of crazed and murderous assault can be accomplished without "malice aforethought."

Maybe so. Maybe Ruben Salazar's death can be legally dismissed as a "police accident," or as the result of "official negligence." Most middle-class, white-dominated juries would probably accept the idea. Why, after all, would a clean-cut young police officer deliberately kill an innocent bystander? Not even Ruben Salazar—ten seconds before his death—could believe that he was about to have his head blown off by a cop for no reason at all. When Gustavo Garcia warned him that the cops outside were about to shoot, Salazar said, "That's impossible; we're not doing anything." Then he stood up and caught a tear gas bomb in his left temple.

The malignant reality of Ruben Salazar's death is that he was murdered by angry cops for no reason at all—and that the L.A. Sheriff's department was and still is prepared to defend that murder on grounds that it was entirely justified. Salazar was killed, they say, because he happened to be in a bar where police thought there was also a "man with a gun." They gave him a chance, they say, by means of a bullhorn warning . . . and when he didn't come out with his hands up, they had no choice but to fire a tear gas bazooka into the bar . . . and his head got in the way. Tough luck. But what was he doing in that place, anyway? Lounging around a noisy Chicano bar in the middle of a communist riot?

What the cops are saying is that Salazar got what he deserved—for a lot of reasons, but mainly because he happened to be in their way when they had to do their duty. His death was unfortunate, but if they had to do it all over again they wouldn't change a note.

This is the point they want to make. It is a local variation on the standard Mitchell-Agnew theme: Don't fuck around, boy—and if you want to hang around with people who do, don't be surprised when the bill comes due—whistling in through the curtains of some darkened barroom on a sunny afternoon when the cops decide to make an example of somebody.

La Raza

"That's impossible; we're not doing anything," said Salazar. Then he stood up and caught a tear gas bomb in the left temple

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The night before I left town I stopped by Acosta's place with Guillermo Restrepo. I had been there earlier, but the air was extremely heavy. As always, on stories like this, some of the troops were getting nervous about The Stranger Hanging Around. I was standing in the kitchen watching Frank put some tacos together and wondering when he was going to start waving the butcher knife in my face and yelling about the time I maced him on my porch in Colorado (that had been six months earlier, at the end of a

—*Continued on Next Page*

Rumblings in Aztlan

—*Continued from Preceding Page*

very long night during which we had all consumed a large quantity of cactus products; and when he started waving a hatchet around I'd figured Mace was the only answer . . . which turned him to jelly for about 45 minutes, and when he finally came around he said, "If I ever see you in East Los Angeles, man, you're gonna wish you never heard the word 'Mace,' because I'm gonna carve it all over your fuckin body.")

So I was not entirely at ease watching Frank chop hamburger on a meat block in the middle of East L.A. He hadn't mentioned the Mace, not yet, but I knew we would get to it sooner or later . . . and I'm sure we would have, except that suddenly out in the living room some geek was screaming: "What the hell is this goddamn gabacho pig writer doing here? Are we fuckin *crazy* to be letting him hear all this shit? Jesus, he's heard enough to put every one of us away for five years!"

Longer than that, I thought. And at that point I stopped worrying about Frank. A firestorm was brewing in the main room—between me and the door—so I decided it was about time to drift around the corner and meet Restrepo at the Carioca. Frank gave me a big smile as I left.

✝

A man police say preyed on elderly women was charged Tuesday with one count of murder and 12 of robbery. Frazier DeWayne Brown, 44, a 6-foot, 2-inch, 230-pound former Los Angeles county sheriff's deputy, was arraigned in the same Hall of Justice courtroom where he once worked as a bailiff. Police had long been seeking a man who befriended elderly women at bus stops and later attacked and robbed them. Evidence against Brown included possessions taken from victims of strong-arm robberies and found in his home. L.A. Times 3/31/71

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Several hours later we came back. Guillermo wanted to talk to Oscar about putting pressure on the KMEX-TV management to keep him (Restrepo) on the air. "They want to get *rid* of me," he explained. "They started the pressure the day after Ruben was killed—the next fuckin day!"

We were sitting on the floor in the living room. Outside, overhead, the police helicopter was looping around in the sky above Whittier Boulevard, sweeping the neighborhood with a giant searchlight beam that revealed nothing—and served no purpose except to drive the Chicanos below into a seething rage. "Those sons of bitches!" Acosta muttered. "*Look* at that goddamn thing!" We had all gone out in the yard to stare up at the monster. There was no way to ignore it. The noise was bad enough, but the probing searchlight was such an obvious, outrageous harassment that it was hard to understand how even a cop could explain it away as anything but deliberate mockery and provocation.

"Now *tell* me," said Acosta. "*Why* are they doing a thing like this? Why? You think they don't *know* what effect it has on us?"

"They know," said Restrepo. He lit a cigarette as we went back inside. "Listen," he said, "I get about fifteen telephone calls every day from people who want to tell me stories about what the police have done to them—*terrible* stories. I've been hearing them for a year and a half, every goddamn day—and the funny thing is, I never used to believe these people. Not completely. I didn't think they were *lying*, just exaggerating." He paused, glancing around the room, but nobody spoke. Restrepo is not entirely trusted in these quarters; he is part of the establishment—like his friend, Ruben Salazar, who bridged that gap the hard way.

"But ever since Ruben," Restrepo continued, "I *believe* these stories. They're true! I realize that, now—but what can I do?" He shrugged, nervously aware that he was talking to people who had made that discovery a long time ago. "Just the other night," he said. "I got a call from a man who said the cops killed his cousin in the yail. He was a homosexual, a young Chicano, nobody political—and the police report said he hung himself in his cell. Suicide. So I checked it out. And, man, it made me sick. This guy's body was *all bruises*, black and blue marks all over him—and right across his forehead he had 16 fresh stitches.

"The police report said he tried to escape so they had to dominate him. They got him sewed up at the hospital, but when they took him to yail, the warden or yailer or whatever they call the bastard wouldn't *accept* him, because he was bleeding so bad. So they took him back to the hospital and got a doctor to sign some paper saying he was OK to be put in the yail. But they had to *carry* him. And the next day they took a picture of him hanging from the end of the top bunk with his own shirt tied around his neck.

"You *believe* that? Not me. But you tell me—what can I *do?* Where do I look for the truth? Who can I ask? The sheriff? Goddamn, I can't go on the air with a story about how the cops killed a guy in the yail unless I *know* something for proof! Jesus Christ, we all *know*. But just to know is not enough. You understand that? You see why I never made that story on TV?"

Acosta nodded. As a lawyer, he understood perfectly that evidence is *necessary*—on the air and in print, as well as in the courtroom. But Frank was not convinced. He was sipping from a quart of sweet Key Largo wine, and in fact he didn't even know who Restrepo was. "Sorry, man," he'd said earlier. "But I don't watch the news on TV."

Acosta winced. *He* watches and reads *everything*. But most of the people around him think The News—on the TV or radio or newspapers or wherever—is just another rotten gabacho trick. Just another bad shuck, like the others. "The news," to them, is pure propaganda—paid for by the advertisers. "Who pays the bill for that bullshit?" they ask. "Who's behind it?"

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Who indeed? Both sides seem convinced that the "real enemy" is a vicious conspiracy of some kind. The Anglo power structure keeps telling itself that "the Mexican problem" is really the work of a small organization of well-trained Communist agitators, working 25 hours a day to transform East L.A. into a wasteland of constant violence—mobs of drug-crazed Chicanos prowling the streets at all times, terrorizing the merchants, hurling firebombs into banks, looting stores, sacking offices and massing now and then, armed with Chinese sten pistols, for all-out assaults on the local sheriff's fortress.

A year ago this grim vision would have been a bad joke, the crude ravings of some paranoid hysterical Bircher. But things are different now; the mood of the barrio is changing so fast that not even the most militant of the young Chicano activists claim to know what's really happening. The only thing everybody agrees on is that the mood is getting ugly, the level of tension is still escalating. The *direction* of the drift is obvious. Even Gov. Reagan is worried about it. He recently named Danny Villanueva, one-time kicking specialist for the Los Angeles Rams and now general manager of KMEX-TV, as the Governor's personal ambassador to the whole Chicano community. But, as usual, Reagan's solution is part of the problem. Villenueva is overwhelmingly despised by the very people Reagan says he's "trying to reach." He is the classic *vendido*. "Let's face it," says a Chicano journalist not usually identified with the militants, "Danny is a goddamn pig. Ruben Salazar told me that. You know KMEX used to be a good news station for Chicanos. Ruben was the one who did that, and Danny was afraid to interfere. But within 24 hours after Ruben was murdered, Villanueva started tearing up the news department. He wouldn't even let Restrepo show films of the cops gassing people in Laguna Park, the day after Ruben died! Now he's trying to get rid of Restrepo, cut the balls off the news and turn KMEX-TV back into a *safe* Tio Taco station. Shit! And he's getting away with it."

The total castration of KMEX-TV would be a crippling blow to the Movement. A major media voice can be an invaluable mobilizing tool, particularly in the vast urban sprawl of Los Angeles. All it takes is a sympathetic news director with enough leverage and personal integrity to deal with the news on his own terms. The man who hired Ruben Salazar, former station director Joe Rank, considered him valuable enough to out-bid the blue-chip Los Angeles Times for the services of one of that paper's ranking stars—so nobody argued when Salazar demanded absolute independence for his KMEX news operation. But with Salazar dead, the station's Anglo ownership moved swiftly to regain control of the leaderless news operation.

Guillermo Restrepo, Salazar's heir apparent, suddenly discovered that he had no leverage at all. He was muscled into a straight newscaster's role. He was no longer free to investigate any story that he felt was important. . . . If the Chicano Moratorium Committee called a press conference to explain why they were organizing a mass rally against "police brutality," for instance, Restrepo had to get permission to cover it. And Chicano activists soon learned that a two-minute news feature on KMEX was crucial to the success of a mass rally, because TV was the only way to reach a mass Chicano audience in a hurry. And no other TV station in L.A. was interested in any kind of Chicano news except riots.

"Losing Ruben was a goddamn disaster for the Movement," Acosta said recently. "He wasn't really *with* us, but at least he was interested. Hell, the truth is I never really liked the guy. But he was the only journalist in L.A. with real influence who would come to a press conference in the barrio. That's the truth. Hell, the only way we can get those bastards to listen to us is by renting a fancy hotel lounge over there in West Hollywood or some bullshit place like that—where *they* can feel comfortable — and hold our press conference there. With free coffee and snacks for the press. But even then, about half the shitheads won't come unless we serve free booze, too. Shit! Do you know what that *costs?*"

✝

This was the tone of our conversation that night when Guillermo and I went over to Oscar's pad for a beer and some talk about politics. The place was unnaturally quiet. No music, no grass, no bad-mouth *bato loco* types hunkered down on the pallets in the front room. It was the first time I'd seen the place when it didn't look like a staging area for some kind of hellish confrontation that might erupt at any moment.

But tonight it was deadly quiet. The only interruption was a sudden pounding on the door and voices shouting: "Hey, man, open up. I got some *brothers* with me!" Rudy hurried to the door and peered out through the tiny eye-window. Then he stepped back and shook his head emphatically. "It's some guys from the project," he told Oscar. "I know them, but they're all fucked up."

"God *damn* it," Acosta muttered. "That's the last thing I need tonight. Get rid of them. Tell them I have to be in court tomorrow. Jesus! I

30 seconds before the death shot . . . sheriff's deputy warns Franco, Garcia and Torres to "get back inside, or I'll shoot"

have to get some sleep!"

Rudy and Frank went outside to deal with the brothers. Oscar and Guillermo went back to politics—while I listened, sensing a downhill drift on all fronts. *Nothing* was going right. The jury was still out on Corky's case, but Acosta was not optimistic. He was also expecting a decision on his Grand Jury challenge in the "Biltmore Six" case. "We'll probably lose that one, too," he said. "The bastards think they have us on the run now; they think we're demoralized—so they'll keep the pressure on, keep pushing." He shrugged. "And maybe they're right. Shit. I'm tired of arguing with them. How long do they expect me to keep coming down to their goddamn courthouse and begging for justice? I'm *tired* of that shit. We're *all* tired." He shook his head slowly, then ripped the poptop out of a Budweiser that Rudy brought in from the kitchen. "This legal bullshit ain't makin it," he went on. "The way it looks now, I think we're just about finished with that game. You know at the noon recess today I had to keep a bunch of these goddamn *batos locos* from stomping the D.A. Christ! That would fuck me for good. They'll send me to the goddamn pen for hiring thugs to assault the prosecutor!" He shook his head again. "Frankly, I think the whole thing is out of control. God only knows where it's heading, but I know it's going to be heavy, I think maybe the real shit is about to come down."

✝

There was no need to ask what he meant by "heavy shit." The barrio is already plagued by sporadic fire-bombings, explosions, shootings and minor violence of all kinds. But the cops see nothing "political" in these incidents. Just before I left town I talked on the phone with a lieutenant at the East L.A. sheriff's office. He was anxious to assure me that the area was totally pacified. "You have to remember," he said, "that this has always been a high-crime area. We have a lot of trouble with teen-age gangs, and it's getting worse. Now they're all running around with .22 rifles and handguns, looking for fights with each other. I guess you could say they're sort of like the Blackstone Rangers in Chicago, except that our gangs are younger."

"But they're not into politics like the black gangs in Chicago?" I asked.

"Are you kidding?" he replied. "The only political thing the Blackstone Rangers ever did was con somebody out of a federal grant for a lot of money."

I asked him about some of the stories I'd heard about bombings, etc. But he quickly dismissed them as rumors. Then, during the next half hour of random talking about things that had happened in the past few weeks, he mentioned one dynamiting and a building burned down at East Los Angeles College, and also the firebombing of a local *vendido* politician's real estate office. "But they hit the wrong guy," the Lt. said with a chuckle. "They bombed another realtor who happened to have the same name as the guy they were after."

"Que malo," I mumbled, lapsing into my own dialect. "But aside from all that, you people don't see real trouble brewing? What about these rallies that keep turning into riots?"

"It's always the same bunch of troublemakers," he explained. "They take a crowd that's gathered for other reasons, and then they subvert it."

"But that last rally was called to protest *police brutality*," I said. "And then it turned into a riot. I saw the films—50 or 60 police cars lined up bumper to bumper on Whittier Boulevard, deputies firing shotguns into the crowd. . . ."

"That was *necessary*," he replied. "That mob was out of control. They *attacked* us."

"I know," I said.

"And let me tell you something else," he went on. "That rally wasn't *really* about 'police brutality.' The guy who organized it, Rosalio Munoz, told me he was just using that slogan to get people out to the park."

"Well, you know how they are," I said. Then I asked him if he could give me the names of any Chicano leaders I should talk to if I decided to write an article about the scene in East L.A.

"Well, there's Congressman Roybal," he said. "And that real estate man I told you about . . ."

"The one who got fire-bombed?"

"Oh no," he replied. "The other guy—the one they *intended* to firebomb."

"OK," I said. "I'll write those names down. And I guess if I decide to look around the barrio you guys could help me out, right? Is it safe to walk around out there, with all these gangs running around shooting at each other?"

"No problem," he said. "We'll even let you ride around in a radio car with some of the officers."

I said that would be fine. What better way, after all, to get the inside story? Just spend a few days touring the barrio in a cop car. Particularly right now, with everything calm and peaceful.

"We see no evidence of any political tension," the Lt. had told me. "We have a great deal of community support." He chuckled. "And we also have a very active intelligence bureau."

"That's good," I said. "Well, I have to hang up now, or I'll miss my plane."

"Oh, then you've decided to do the story? When will you be in town?"

"I've been here for two weeks," I said. "My plane leaves in ten minutes."

"But I thought you said you were calling from San Francisco," he said.

"I did," I said. "But I was lying." (click)

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It was definitely time to leave. The last loose end in the Salazar case had been knotted up that morning when the jury came back with a "guilty" verdict for Corky Gonzales. He was sentenced to "40 days and 40 nights" in the L.A. County jail for possession of a loaded revolver on the day of Salazar's death. "We'll appeal," said Acosta, "but for political purposes this case is finished. Nobody's worried about Corky surviving 40 days in jail. We wanted to confront the *gabacho* court system with a man the whole Chicano community knew was technically innocent, then let them draw their own conclusions about the verdict.

"Hell, we never denied that *somebody* had a loaded pistol in that truck. But it wasn't Corky. He wouldn't dare carry a goddamn gun around with him. He's a *leader*. He doesn't have to carry a gun for the same goddamn reason Nixon doesn't."

Acosta had not stressed that point in the courtroom, for fear of alarming the jury and inflaming the gringo press. Not to mention the cops. Why give them the same kind of flimsy excuse to shoot at Gonzales that they had already used to justify shooting Ruben Salazar?

Corky merely shrugged at the verdict. At 42, he has spent half his life gouging Justice out of The Man, and now he views the Anglo court system with quiet sort of fatalistic humor that Acosta hasn't learned yet. But Oscar is getting there fast. The week of April Fools Day, 1971, was a colossal bummer for him; a series of bad jolts and setbacks that seemed to confirm all his worst suspicions.

La Raza

Clockwise: 30 seconds after . . . 60 seconds . . . 90 seconds and first bullhorn warning . . . but Ruben is already dead

Two days after Corky's conviction, Superior Court Judge Arthur Alarcon—a prominent Mexican-American jurist—rejected Acosta's carefully-constructed motion to quash the "Biltmore Six" indictments because of "sub-conscious, institutional racism" in the Grand Jury system. This effort had taken almost a year of hard work, much of it done by Chicano law students who reacted to the verdict with a bitterness matching Acosta's.

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Then, later that same week, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors voted to use public funds to pay all legal expenses for several policemen recently indicted "for accidentally" killing two Mexican nationals—a case known in East L.A. as "the murder of the Sanchez brothers." It was a case of mistaken identity, the cops explained. They had somehow been given the wrong address of an apartment where they thought "two Mexican fugitives" were holed up, so they hammered on the door and shouted a warning to "come out of there with your hands over your head or we'll come in shooting." Nobody came out, so the cops went in shooting to kill.

But how could they have known that they'd attacked the wrong apartment? And how could they have known that neither one of the Sanchez brothers understood English? Even Mayor Sam Yorty and Police Chief Ed Davis admitted that the killings had been very unfortunate. But when the Federal D.A. brought charges against the cops, both Yorty and Davis were publicly outraged. They both called press conferences and went on the air to denounce the indictments—in language that strangely echoed the American Legion outcry when Lt. Calley was charged with murdering women and children at My Lai.

The Yorty/Davis tirades were so gross that a District Court judge finally issued a "gag order" to keep them quiet until the case comes to trial. But they had already said enough to whip the whole barrio into a rage at the idea that Chicano tax dollars might be used to defend some "mad dog cops" who frankly admitted killing two Mexican nationals. It sounded like a replay of the Salazar bullshit: same style, same excuse, same result—but this time with different names, and blood on a different floor. "They'll put me in jail if I won't pay taxes," said a young Chicano watching a soccer game at a local playground, "then they take my tax money and use it to defend some killer pig. Hell, what if they had come to my address by mistake? I'd be dead as hell right now."

There was a lot of talk in the barrio about "drawing some pig blood for a change" if the Supervisors actually voted to use tax funds to defend the accused cops. A few people actually called city hall and mumbled anonymous threats in the name of the "Chicano Liberation Front." But the Supervisors hung tough. They voted on Thursday, and by noon the news was out: The city would pick up the tab.

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At 5:15 PM on Thursday afternoon the Los Angeles City Hall was rocked by a dynamite blast. A bomb had been planted in one of the downstairs restrooms. Nobody was hurt, and the damage was officially described as "minor." About $5000 worth, they said—small potatoes, compared to the bomb that blew a wall out of the District Attorney's office last fall after Salazar died.

When I called the sheriff's office to ask about the explosion they said they couldn't talk about it. City Hall was out of their jurisdiction. But they were more than willing to talk when I asked if it was true that the bomb had been the work of the Chicano Liberation Front.

"Where'd you hear that?"

"From the City News Service."

"Yeah, it's true," he said. "Some woman called up and said it was done in memory of the Sanchez brothers, by the Chicano Liberation Front. We've heard about those guys. What do *you* know about them?"

"Nothing," I said. "That's why I called the sheriff. I thought your intelligence network might know something."

"Sure they do," he said quickly. "But all that information is confidential."